

**THE EFFECTS OF THE MULTILITERACIES APPROACH ON THE WRITING  
PERFORMANCE OF EFL STUDENTS IN A CHINESE SCHOOL IN PENANG:  
TEACHER AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS**

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**by**

**MALINI GANAPATHY**

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| MLITA | Multiliteracies Approach                       |
| EFL   | English as a Second Language                   |
| EPRD  | Education Planning and Research Development    |
| PPSMI | Teaching of Science and Mathematics in English |
| LBD   | Learning by Design                             |
| LBDM  | Learning by Design Model                       |
| ZPD   | Zone of Proximal Development                   |
| LE    | Learning Element                               |
| LEs   | Learning Elements                              |
| ICT   | Information and Communication Technology       |
| ICTs  | Information and Communication Technologies     |
| PRF   | Peer Review Forms                              |
| TRS   | Teacher Rating Sheets                          |



**KESAN PENDEKATAN MULTILITERASI TERHADAP PRESTASI PENULISAN  
PELAJAR BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA ASING DI SEBUAH  
SEKOLAH CINA DI PULAU PINANG: PERSEPSI GURU DAN PELAJAR  
ABSTRAK**

Dalam menghadapi cabaran globalisasi, realiti global hari ini merupakan kesan perubahan ekonomi daripada evolusi dinamik teknologi maklumat dan komunikasi, dan evolusi celik IT di tempat kerja. Kajian yang dijalankan pada umumnya menunjukkan tahap pelajar yang terlibat dalam proses penulisan Bahasa Inggeris sangat minimum sementara guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris lebih memberikan penekanan pada hasil pembelajaran. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengetahui kesan pendekatan multiliterasi dalam meningkatkan kemahiran penulisan karangan selanjar atau karangan respon terbuka dalam kalangan pelajar berbangsa Cina yang belajar bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing, menilai persepsi guru Bahasa Inggeris untuk pengajaran penulisan selanjar/karangan respon terbuka, menilai persepsi pelajar Cina yang belajar menulis karangan melalui penggunaan kaedah pendekatan multiliterasi (KPM), menilai persepsi guru menyiapkan pengajaran penulisan karangan menggunakan Elemen Belajar (EB) dan menentukan faktor-faktor yang perlu dipertimbangkan ketika menggunakan kaedah KPM dalam proses pengajaran penulisan karangan jenis ini. Sampel kajian terdiri daripada 37 orang pelajar Cina di sebuah sekolah menengah, seorang guru kajian tindakan, tiga orang pemerhati kelas dan tiga orang penilai. Lembaran Penilaian Guru (LPG) diintegrasikan sebagai instrumen

dalam kajian ini dan ternyata keputusan positif yang signifikan didapati iaitu menunjukkan prestasi penulisan pelajar menulis karangan selanjar/respon terbuka. Borang Penilaian Rakan (BPR) digunakan sebagai instrumen untuk mengukur hasil pembelajaran EB 1 hingga EB 6. Untuk menganalisis hasil keseluruhan BPR, dinyatakan penemuan secara signifikan statistik bagi menyokong kesan positif daripada kaedah KPM terhadap prestasi penulisan karangan selanjar/respon terbuka pelajar. Analisis skor karangan mendedahkan bahawa pelajar-pelajar yang lemah meningkat secara signifikan untuk kemahiran penulisan karangan. Namun, dari segi sub-skor bahasa untuk penulisan karangan, prestasi individu tidak ada peningkatan yang signifikan dalam aspek ini. Persepsi positif para guru melalui integrasi Pembelajaran dengan Model Desain (PDMD) menggunakan kaedah KPM untuk pengajaran penulisan karangan menunjukkan keberkesanan kaedah KPM. EB telah menghasilkan perbezaan dalam perancangan pengajaran penulisan dan sekali gus mempengaruhi keputusan positif pembelajaran pelajar. Pelajar-pelajar yang terlibat dalam kajian ini telah menyatakan bahawa pembelajaran mereka menarik dan mempunyai peluang untuk menggunakan kreativiti mereka dalam pelbagai aktiviti tugas semasa pembelajaran KPM. Para pelajar yang lemah juga menyatakan bahawa kegiatan kerjasama membantu mereka dalam menjalankan tugas yang diberi dan menguasai kemahiran untuk menulis dengan bantuan daripada rakan-rakan. Berdasarkan penemuan ini, penyelidik mengesyorkan agar kaedah KPM dilaksanakan oleh para guru Bahasa Inggeris, dan kaedah ini penting untuk keberkesanan pengembangan kemahiran penulisan karangan dalam kalangan pelajar yang menggunakan bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing.

**THE EFFECTS OF THE MULTILITERACIES APPROACH ON THE WRITING  
PERFORMANCE OF EFL STUDENTS IN A CHINESE SCHOOL IN PENANG:  
TEACHER AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS**

**ABSTRACT**

In coping with the challenges of globalisation, the realities of today's global economic change impacts on the dynamic evolution of information and communication technology (ICT) and literacy evolution in the workplace. Studies at large reveal that the level of engagement which English as a foreign language (EFL) students are involved in during the writing process is minimal and teachers are more concerned towards the end product. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the Multiliteracies Approach (MLITA) would be effective in enhancing the continuous writing performance of Chinese students who study English as a foreign language, evaluate EFL teachers' perceptions of teaching continuous writing, evaluate Chinese EFL students' perceptions of learning continuous writing using the MLITA, evaluate EFL teachers' perceptions of preparing writing lessons using the Learning Element (LE) and determine the factors that need to be taken into consideration when using the MLITA in the teaching of continuous writing. The sample of the study comprised of 37 Chinese EFL students in a secondary school, an action research teacher, three EFL classroom observers and three EFL raters. The Teacher Rating Sheets (TRS) was integrated as a research instrument in this study and the findings were positively significant in relation to students' continuous writing performance. The Peer Rating Forms (PRF) was used as an instrument to gauge the learning outcomes of LE 1 to LE 6.

In analysing the overall scores of the PRF, findings were statistically significant in favour of the positive effect of the MLITA on students' continuous writing performance. Analyses of the samples' essay scores revealed that the below average students improved significantly in their individual writing skills. However, in terms of language sub-scores for individual writing performance, there was no significant improvement in this aspect. The EFL teachers' positive perceptions of the process approach and LBDM integrated through the MLITA to writing lessons indicates the effectiveness of the MLITA. The LE has made a difference in the planning of students' writing lessons and simultaneously affecting students' positive learning outcomes. Students' perceived their writing lessons as interesting and exciting as they had the opportunity to use their creativity in the various tasks. The below average students highlighted that the collaborative activities assisted them in carrying out the tasks and mastering the skills for writing with the assistance of peers. In light of these findings, the researcher recommends that the MLITA be implemented by EFL teachers, and this is vital in effectively developing students' writing skills.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Today's education is perceived as a gateway to avenues that enables each individual to participate in various global debates, to make informed choices and a creative contribution that can empower not just individuals, but whole classes and communities towards nation-building (Pullen and Cole, 2010). In coping with the challenges of globalisation, the realities of today's global economic change impacts on the dynamic evolution of information and communication technology (ICT hereafter) and literacy evolution in the workplace. It is vital that these changes are addressed in educational settings to meet the current demands and challenges of various societies which are vital to ensure that education is relevant to global standards. The education curriculum should take this aspect into consideration in order to produce students who are knowledgeable, competent and possess attributes and skills which are necessary for the changing demands of the labour market.

Kalantzis & Cope (2009:168) note that the profound changes in today's globalised era, demand that learning and education prepare students "to engage meaningfully in the world in new ways and that schools need to change and reconceptualise learning to interrogate more deeply conceptions of literacy, knowledge and the purposes of learning". In the local scenario, according to the Education Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, it was reported that all schools will increase the hours of English lessons per week by 2011. For English lessons, the

time will be increased to 120 minutes a week from just 60 minutes at present and this is as a result of the abolishment of the Teaching of Science and Mathematics in English (PPSMI) programme in 2010. However, he said the school hours will not be increased but will be adjusted to be more creative and enjoyable for students (The Malaysian Insider, 2010).

The present age of information promotes a knowledge economy that focuses on the use of information and knowledge through innovation and creativity (Leino, 2006; Menkhoff and Bengtsson, 2011). Additionally, the English language has grown to predominantly play a significant role whereby it is the linguistic mode in relation to the field of world economy and it is a medium to confront the challenges of corporate sectors, governments and technological revolutions. Gill (2002:36) asserts that in view of Malaysia's vision to achieve a developed status by 2020, an important aspect will encompass that the citizens have the competency to "communicate effectively in English to enable them to compete on the international platform". This view recognizes English as a foreign language (EFL hereafter) for communication and networking which encompasses the teaching and learning of English as a critical component in coping with the challenges of its role as the lingua franca of international commerce, science, engineering and technology (Singh, Kell and Pandian, 2002).

Malaysia's blueprint of its Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011-2015) is the national agenda to prepare students to compete in the global community. The Tenth Malaysia Plan focuses on "the aspirations of both the Government Transformation Programme and the New Economic Model, premised on high income, inclusiveness and sustainability. To achieve Malaysia's aspirations, it is imperative to develop, attract and retain a first-world talent base" (Tenth Malaysia Plan,

2010:54). The human capital is perceived as holistic in nature where emphasis is placed on producing students who are well equipped with knowledge and skills that encompass science and technology, entrepreneurial capabilities, cultural values and other positive attributes. Hence, the talent base and workforce of high-income nations entail higher education qualifications to facilitate knowledge generation and innovation, high skill-levels in both technical and professional fields, and fruitful productivity. In relation to where popular culture, communications and media is an avenue for knowledge making, learners have to engage simultaneously with ICT and the resources of popular culture to reconceptualise the notion of plural cultures as part of literacy in education, workplace and in social life (Koo, 2005).

In this vein, the various aspects of the Malaysian education system has to address the “significant gap to close in order to achieve a first-world talent base, and Malaysia is increasingly at risk of falling behind” (Tenth Malaysia Plan, 2010:4). Teaching English language literacy skills in contemporary EFL classrooms is evolving dynamically in cohesion with the multiplicity of communication channels, media, cultural and linguistic diversity (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005).

Students engage with different texts according to their social and private contexts which include web-based stories, interactive stories, hyper narratives in computer games, internet, podcasting, online news, e-mail, text messaging, MSN, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, and weblogs. These new practices fundamentally change perspectives of students’ learning process in the classroom as they are being integrated as part of the global world through the mass media, internet and the multiplicity of communication channels and social networking.

In addressing these new challenges, EFL students require new approaches to understand literacies used in making meanings from multimodal communication elements which is relevant when integrated into teachers' pedagogical practices. Dimmock (2005:28) makes the point that this "interface between student learning outcomes (goals, skills or competencies, which may be expressed in cognitive, affective and behavioural terms) and learning per se, is critical in raising to pre-eminence, the strategies by which learning is promoted". The concept of multiliteracies has become more relevant and prominent in current literacy and learning scenarios. Accordingly, Tan and McWilliam (2009) assert that 21<sup>st</sup> century learning should involve elements of multiliteracies that relate to students' lifeworlds which makes learning more relevant and interesting.

The birth of new digital technologies is linked to current terms in the literature review which Cope & Kalantzis (2009:8) conceptualise as "new worlds, new learning environments, new persons and new literacies". The learning that takes place in the classrooms today has to be relevant to the reality of real world developments in the face of globalisation of world economy and various information and communication technologies (ICTs hereafter). The teacher is the medium and has to ensure that learning in the classrooms is planned with the integration of ICTs as a tool to facilitate learning to greater heights. However, educational practices in the Malaysian context is still backward to a certain extent where Sachithanantham (2009) points out that the lesson plan adopted since the British education system which is still currently used at the Teacher Training Colleges and schools, curbs the creativity of the teachers. Hence, it is highlighted that when teachers plan their lessons in school, the framework of the lesson plan



promotes traditional pedagogical practices that result in the chalk and talk teaching method where the textbook is the central mode of focus.

However, the Malaysian Education Ministry is continuously taking efforts to ensure that the education system is compliant to global standards. In light of this, the Education Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin (Star, 2010:6) has launched a new education policy which is deemed as a continuous effort from the Smart School initiative launched in 1997. This education policy in the country is set to take a new leap forward and it is set to embrace ICTs as the main tool for teaching where the emphasis is on the policy's main objective to engage teachers and students in using ICTs to facilitate creativity, collaborative learning, critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Besides that, the Education Minister had pointed out that the "teaching and learning process is no longer a teacher-centric or one-way process. A teacher is now a classroom facilitator, who is equipped with ICT knowledge and this is in view of uplifting the quality of education in the country" (Star, 2010:6). He further stressed that ICT practices in developed countries would be used as a benchmark to ensure that the ICT component in Malaysian schools reflect international standards. This new education policy aims to align the quality of the Malaysian education to the vision of making Malaysia an excellent education hub, in line with the status of an advanced nation by the year 2020.

In this vein, the Multiliteracies Approach (MLITA hereafter) to pedagogy constitutes the conceptual framework of this study, where the LBD model (LBDM hereafter) that is grounded in the Multiliteracies theory underlies this approach which is perceived as an educational response to current times (Kalantzis and Cope, 2005). In the LBDM, the Learning Element (LE hereafter) is introduced as a

document that facilitates the teachers' planning of lessons based on the knowledge processes. This pedagogical approach that is advocated in this model through the knowledge processes, promotes higher order thinking skills and creative and innovative learning in the classroom where the emphasis is on addressing students' interest in learning.

This framework underlying the MLITA facilitates the usage of digital technologies during the learning process in the classroom. In the MLITA, literacy is not viewed as a single commodity as meaning is made in multimodal ways when ICTs are integrated in the teaching and learning process through the LE which is used as a lesson plan. The LE consists of knowledge processes that encourage various pedagogical repertoires of the teacher in terms of advocating creative learning practices. The MLITA is also perceived to be a framework that is relevant to current teaching practices as it engages and challenges all students in their learning, provides explicit teaching, makes learning relevant and ensures learner transformation (van Haren, 2005).

The English language is linked to the critical factors of local diversity and global connectedness and this relates to the growing importance of language, culture and identity in mediating differences in learning settings (Koo, 2003). Hence, the growing diversity of literacy in today's technological and information era has resulted in the need to address the changes that impact on the education system. Pandian (2007) highlights that the decline in the standard of English in Malaysia can be due to factors related to policy, pedagogy, teaching methods, students' interest and teacher proficiency. There is a need for EFL teachers to reflect on their teaching methods, practices and approaches and they need to seek ways to enhance students' performance in various English language skills.

Prevalent in second language writing instruction are the rules of writing which focuses on correctness of form over function. In class, students passively practice writing by reproducing models of writing rather than expressing their own ideas and writing creatively. In this vein, students are expected to enhance their writing performance. “Formerly, writing was utilised to show that students were competent in a particular grammatical rule, rather than having knowledge about the topic discussed” (Hazidi, 2008:83). Dean (2006) posits that most importantly correct spelling, grammar, and overall organisation are the essential evidences of second language proficiency, where writing is perceived as an academic activity that aims to hone students’ writing skills. Therefore, it is vital to be aware that the “recognition of the compositional nature of writing has changed the face of writing classes” (Brown, 2001:19).

Students should be taught the appropriate writing approach to ensure that they are guided through the stages of the writing process which are pre- writing, while-writing, revising a few drafts, editing, proof reading and the final product. According to Hazidi (2008), teachers must also explain and rationalise every step of the composing process to the students, and consequently provide adequate and constructive feedback to the writing, both from the students’ peers and the teacher. This will ensure that the final writing product will be a clear, coherent and comprehensible piece of writing and this is referred to as the process approach (Paltridge, 2004; Mukundan, 2011).

However, in the Malaysian landscape, the English Language Programme is propelled by a curriculum that is exam-oriented and therefore, EFL teachers do not teach writing creatively by using the process approach or integrate technology in their teaching practices. On the other hand, teachers are compelled to plan the

teaching of writing using the lesson plan and the traditional product approach which does not adhere to current research developments (Siti and Abdul Hameed, 2006). The Ministry of Education introduced the process writing approach in 1993 but due to time constraints in completing the prescribed syllabus which aligns to the exam-oriented curriculum, EFL teachers conform to the product approach (Zaharah, 1993; Siti, 1998; Shamsuddin et al., 2010) that highlights the emphasis on structure, mechanics and linguistic accuracy in order for students to perform well in their national exams.

The educational issues globally and in the Malaysian context pose crucial challenges to teachers in the teaching and learning of EFL writing, especially in relation to the widespread of ICTs. There are no studies on using the MLITA to investigate students' writing performance in EFL classrooms. Thus, the present study aimed to fill this gap in the literature as it examined the effects of the MLITA on continuous writing performance of EFL learners in a Chinese school in Penang. The study also focused on using the process approach which underlies the MLITA to investigate its effectiveness in enhancing students' writing performance as currently the process approach which is situated in the EFL writing curriculum, is a neglected aspect in EFL writing classrooms. The main aim for choosing Chinese students as the target group was that these students' learning and writing performance based on their perspectives will have important implications for teacher education programmes as well as for teachers' pedagogical repertoires.

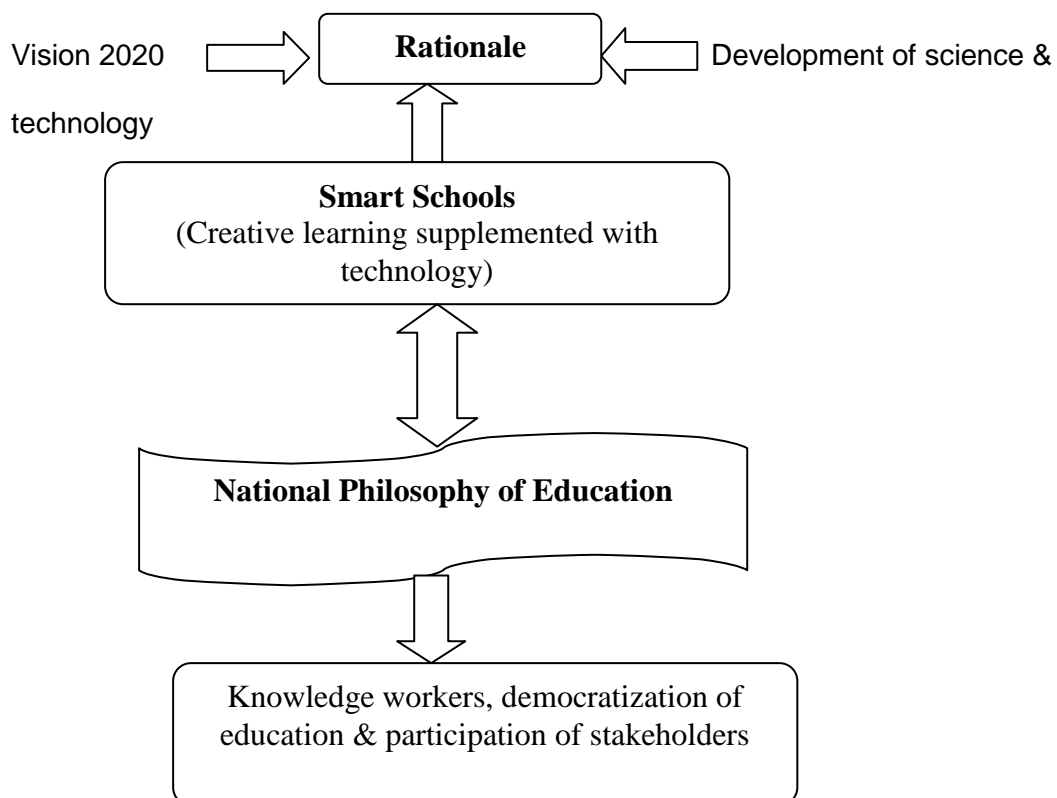
## **1.2 Background to the Study**

As a background to this study, it is first necessary to discuss the Malaysian education policies and the Malaysian EFL Programme. It is hoped that a brief look into the Malaysian education system can contextualise this study in relation to the issues of EFL teaching and learning practices in the present schooling system.

### **1.2.1 Smart School Concept**

The smart school concept is vital to be discussed in this section as this policy has been further developed by the Ministry of Education where an ICT policy was launched by the Minister of Education on 13 October, 2010. This new policy which is an extension of the smart school project is aimed to bridge the quality of Malaysian education to the vision of making Malaysia an excellent education hub in its stride to achieve the country's vision by 2020. According to the National Philosophy of Education (1998), education in Malaysia involves ongoing efforts towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, which is aligned to produce persons who are balanced harmoniously, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically. This effort integrated in the National Philosophy of Education (1998), is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, possess high moral standards, responsible and capable of achieving high moral standards and personal well being and able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, society and the nation at large.

Frost and Sullivan (2006:55) note in relation to Figure 1.1, that the Smart School Concept is a technologically-supported initiative to “move away from rote-learning and drill strategies to a form of teaching that stimulates thinking, creativity, catering for students’ needs, individual abilities and learning styles, as well as targeted towards more equitable access”. It also highlights that this concept encourages learning practices based on creative thinking and problem-solving. In 1996, the Smart School had become one of the seven flagship applications of the Multimedia Super Corridor. The main intention was to transform the Malaysian educational system, in line with and in support of the nation’s drive to fulfill Vision 2020.



**Figure 1.1: Smart School Concept (adapted from Frost and Sullivan, 2006)**

As reflected in Figure 1.1, this Vision entails the necessity for a sustained, productivity-driven growth, which will be achievable through a technologically literate, critically thinking work force prepared to participate fully in the global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in line with Malaysia's National Philosophy of Education. The most distinctive feature of the Smart School emphasis is on building a teaching and learning environment that takes into consideration international best practices in primary and secondary education, which has the capability to promote the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and teaching-learning materials in a mutually reinforcing and coherent manner.

The Smart school project stresses specifically on four subjects, English, Bahasa Malaysia, Science and Mathematics to be taught the Smart-way (Azizah et al. 2005). A study which investigates the teaching and learning practices of this approach and the teachers' and students' perceptions of their effectiveness on the teaching and learning of English language in particular, revealed that various other approaches have to be considered and practiced in order to learn "English the Smart-way" (Azizah et al., 2005:9).

However, the Smart School pedagogy is curtailed by the Malaysian education system that is exam-oriented as the focus is on rote-learning and due to this phenomenon, Yahya and Xavier (2007) argue that teachers lack effective pedagogical repertoires to address students' learning needs in contemporary classrooms. In relation to teaching EFL, teachers need to be equipped with various pedagogical approaches that are necessary to facilitate language learning. A large scale study was conducted by the Ministry of Education (2006) to gauge the impact of the Smart School Pilot (1999 to 2002) implementation before making all 10,000 schools nationwide 'Smart' by the end of 2010. The findings of

the impact study would serve as a point of reference for the “rollout approach and for any correction to be made on the existing deployment and operational model” (Ministry of Education, 2006:2).

Key stakeholders (students/teachers/administrators) participated in this study and they were from 33 selected schools (from 88 pilot schools) nationwide, inclusive of residential and non-residential schools in rural and urban areas.

The following were the findings:

- a. Approximately 90 percent of students had ICT skills to use the facilities for learning. More than 89 percent of students possessed intermediate to advanced ICT skills.
- b. More than 50 percent of students were unable to conduct independent/self learning due to limitations in facilities access and content.
- c. Teachers' ICT competencies have been positively impacted.
- d. Around 83 percent of the teachers' fell into the 'upper intermediate' and above categories, reflecting high ICT skills.
- e. Around 90 percent of teachers were using the computer lab for lessons and preparation of materials.
- f. Teachers found Internet and PPSMI (teaching of mathematics and science in English) courseware to be the most useful ICT facilities for teaching and learning. TV Pendidikan was considered the least useful.
- g. Teachers could integrate selected ICT facilities during lessons and Internet access and PPSMI teaching courseware were the two preferred ICT facilities.

(Ministry of Education, 2006)



The findings from this study suggest that teachers are basically well equipped with ICT skills and to a certain extent schools are furnished with adequate ICT facilities. Therefore, it is the teachers' initiative to implement various innovative pedagogical practices in the classroom.

### **1.2.2 Tenth Malaysia Plan**

The developments at the global level have profound implications on Malaysia since independence and therefore, the policies of the Ministry of Education have always taken into consideration the need to develop employability including the development of literacy for the workplace in terms of awareness, deployment and strategic presentation of required knowledge, attributes, skills and strategies (Pandian et al., 2011; Vayaravasamy and Anna, 2011). Similarly, the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011 – 2015:185) takes into account the Government's aim to practically upgrade human capital and talent development by:

- Revamping the education system to significantly raise student outcomes;
- Raising the skills of Malaysians to increase employability; and
- Reforming the labour market to transform Malaysia into a high-income nation.

The Tenth Malaysia Education plan aims to revamp the education system to enhance students' outcomes and upgrade the education system to international standards and to "close the current achievement gap across schools as Malaysia runs the risk of being left behind in education today and in competitiveness tomorrow" (Tenth Malaysia Plan, 2010:190). The National Philosophy of

Education (1988) will be adhered to closely when efforts are taken under this plan to revamp the education system and advocate transformation towards achieving a progressive and high-income nation.

One of the main aims of the Tenth Malaysia Plan is that the “use of information and communications technology in schools will be given greater emphasis to nurture creativity and innovation among students, in order to equip them with new skills and capabilities to meet the demands of a high-income economy” (Tenth Malaysia Plan, 2010: 195). The aim of this plan also includes strengthening the English programme by enhancing English proficiency as a measure to ensure Malaysia’s competitiveness.

The programme will aim at improving the teaching and learning of English with the implementation of a new curriculum which focuses on the five skills that encompass reading, speaking, listening, writing and grammar. “The curriculum will provide an avenue for students to progress according to their capabilities, nurture students to be responsible for their own learning through exploration and unleash their potentials. Besides that, the curriculum will emphasise creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship across all subjects” (Tenth Malaysia Plan, 2010:212).

The Tenth Malaysia Plan highlights the human capital development as vital in the economic transformation from a middle income to a high income nation where “achieving a globally competitive and innovation-led economy requires a systematic and comprehensive approach to nurturing, attracting and retaining top talent for the nation” (Tenth Malaysia Plan, 2010:242).

### 1.2.3 The Teaching of EFL in Malaysian Schools

The central focus of the Secondary School English Language Programme in *KBSM* is the development of the four language skills that entail reading, writing, listening and speaking. In fact, it is stipulated in the curriculum specifications that teaching is to emphasise both the *oracy* (listening and speaking) and the *literacy* (reading and writing) skills. The objectives of EFL teaching are to enable the learners to:

- listen to and understand spoken English in the school and in real life situations,
- speak effectively on a variety of topics,
- read and understand prose and poetry for information and enjoyment; and
- write effectively for different purposes.

(Ministry of Education, 1992)

Writing is a demanding activity especially for EFL students who are linguistically diverse (Baker, 2008). The aim of the writing programme in the Malaysian English Language Curriculum (Chitravelu et al. 2005:142) outlines:

- a. step-by-step instruction
- b. provision of models
- c. the need to teach language (grammar and vocabulary) appropriate to the writing needs of students; and
- d. focus on the various stages of the writing process.

This programme emphasises the implementation of the process and product approach to teaching and learning of the writing skill. The step-by-step instruction includes (a) the school level where the focus is on the different stages of the students' development of writing readiness, early writing, developmental writing and mature writing; (b) the accountability between the teacher and student is where the teacher can provide writing tasks or allow free writing where students are in control of their writing and based on the traditional EFL contexts, students' writing can range from controlled composition, guided composition and free composition and (c) the various components of a written text should not be taught without a meaningful context.

The provision of models (Chitravelu et al., 2005:144) in the writing programme is to:

- a. highlight the different kinds of writing and the expectations required
- b. provide organisational framework and language
- c. provide a model for imitation.

The Malaysian English Language Programme advocates that the skill of writing be taught concurrently with reading, listening and speaking which results in this skill being perceived as a neglected aspect in the EFL classroom. English lessons are limited to eight periods per week and the EFL teacher is expected to teach the four skills together with grammar and hence, is confronted with the challenge to complete the syllabus. In 1992, the Ministry of Education introduced the process approach to writing as an integral component of the English curriculum. The emphasis was on a recursive process and students were supposed to be exposed to invention strategies to generate ideas and coherently

organise it into a strategic plan that would be transformed into drafts that will go through the process of revising and editing.

However, due to an exam-oriented culture, the process approach is deemed by EFL teachers as not feasible in tandem with its time-consuming features in terms of complying to various processes before the final product is ready and hence, results in EFL teachers still highlighting linguistic accuracy (Mukundan, 2011; Mohd. Saat Abbas, 2011). The limited English periods per week results in teachers' reluctance in employing the process approach as a pedagogical tool because the product approach is perceived as a better alternative for producing more practices and the EFL teachers are accountable to the English Panel for a particular amount of essays in total for a year. Several Malaysian researchers point out that the writing pedagogical approach employed in schools currently fails to generate students who are well-versed in producing essays that reflect good writing skills (Mohd. Saat Abbas, 2011; Siti and Abdul Hameed, 2006; Nor Shidrah et al., 2005; Siti, 1998; Zaharah, 1993).

Students at the elementary and secondary levels need to have a strong foundation in their writing skills in order to meet the challenges during tertiary education. Academic writing is challenging as it demands conscious effort and practice in composing, developing and analysing ideas. Myles (2002) contends that when students write in a second language, they are confronted with social and cognitive challenges related to the second language acquisition. Therefore, students require appropriate exposure to various writing approaches through effective pedagogical practices that develop the fundamentals of writing skills.

### **1.2.3.1 Profile of the Chinese Secondary School (School A)**

The Principal of the Chinese secondary school where the study was to be carried out had requested the cooperation of the researcher in terms of maintaining the confidentiality of the school's identity. Hence, it was mutually agreed that details of the schools identity will be kept confidential as a measure to safeguard the well being of the teachers and students who were participants of this study. The Chinese secondary school where this study was conducted will be labeled as school A.

Initiatives were taken around 1994 and 1995 in view of transforming school A and these efforts have reaped benefits which are evidenced by the ever increasing students' enrolment. The total number of teachers in this school is 166 and the student enrolment is 2820. The transformation to improve the school's discipline, co-curricular activities and its academic performance was implemented in phases.

The school motto of the Chinese Secondary school where the study was conducted is "To Contrive and To Serve" and the school vision is "Local Roots, Global Outlook. The school mission is:

- To instil moral and cultural values in students.
- To train students to think with an open mind.
- To prepare students to face global challenges.

School A's administration is of the belief that it is vital in establishing a long-term vision, in order to facilitate academic progress of students. School A's motto reflects the importance of taking a broader view of students' learning approaches

through teaching and other modes which integrate elements of motivational talks and projects to consolidate learning. The positive outcome is reflected in its excellent academic achievements in the public exams that are PMR, SPM and STPM.

The analysis for SPM English in 2007 (97.42%), 2008 (99.14%) and 2009 (97.23%) and 2010 (97.00) shows a steady increase in the number of passes excluding year 2009 and 2010. The English Department has a total of 22 experienced English teachers. The Head of the English Panel pointed out that students in the school were weak in their writing and this weakness affects their overall performance and this is especially reflected in the 2009 and 2010 results. It was highlighted that students found the continuous writing section of the English Paper 1 to be very challenging. Hence, this study is vital in addressing this shortcoming faced by EFL students in this Chinese secondary school and the administration deems it necessary to facilitate ongoing efforts to specifically upgrade the English language performance of students.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

One of the most daunting and challenging skills for EFL students in Malaysia is the writing skill and in relation to this, Nor Shidrah et al. (2005) highlight that students' anxiety and boredom in the writing classroom is further aggravated when teachers pressure students to produce linguistically accurate essays without exposing them to current approaches to writing in a creative manner. Schools in Malaysia, as in many other countries, are characterised by conventional approaches to grammar drills, classroom confined settings, text-book centred

methods, teacher as the primary source of information, students as passive learners, excessive pressure to pass exams and an emphasis on uniformity (Zaharah, 1993; Darshan and Ong, 2003; Pandian, 2007; Ganapathy, 2007; Satchinanthan, 2009; Normah, 2009; Mukundan, 2011; Mohd. Saat Abbas et al., 2011).

Currently, in the Malaysian education system, the lesson plan has been the teachers' basis for planning a lesson since 1959. Sachithanantham (2009) points out that the Teacher Training Colleges have been using this restricted method of lesson plan called the Presentation, Process and Production which was advocated by the British 50 years ago. The lesson plan restricts the teachers' creativity to plan lessons if compared to the LE advocated in the LBDM (2005) in the MLITA.

Pandian (2007) reiterates that educators should inevitably reciprocate to current changes by learning new tools, approaches and skills. The current pedagogical practices employed by teachers in the secondary school system based on the lesson plan do not address the interest of the present generation which is focused in engaging themselves outside school hours in a digital communication environment (Ganapathy and Kaur, 2011; Chye, 2011; Nurzali Ismail, 2011; Meng, 2011; Arafah Karimi, 2011). Hence, the LE instead of the lesson plan which will be used in this study, paves the way to the "emerging knowledge society that requires a radically new approach to learning" as globalisation intertwines with new and modern technological implications (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005). To date, few studies have taken a close look at the adoption and diffusion process of Multiliteracies initiatives (Tan and McWilliam, 2009).



The Malaysian English Language Programme advocates the process approach but on the contrary, teachers' pedagogical repertoires are traditionally bound to the product approach that adheres to the exam-oriented education curriculum (Zaharah, 1993; Nor Shidrah et. al, 2005; Shahrina & Norhisham, 2006; Tan, 2006; Shamsuddin et al., 2010; Syafini and Tengku Nor Rizan, 2010). EFL teachers are still in the practice of exclusively teaching essays using the product approach which aligns to an EFL curriculum that stresses on linguistic and syntactic accuracy which meets the demand of national exams (Nor Shidrah et al., 2005; Siti and Abdul Hameed, 2006; Chan and Ain, 2004; Mohd. Saat Abbas et al., 2011). As a result, students continue to experience various problems in writing where they are unable to be creative in their ideas and plan and develop ideas into statements and paragraphs. Hence, many students are at a loss on the manner in which they should write when they are expected to fulfill the requirements of writing essays.

In this case, students are not motivated to learn during the writing lessons and they are not in favour of their traditional writing classes (Chow, 2007; Syafini and Tengku Nor Rizan, 2010; Mukundan, 2011). Teachers perceive their writing lessons to be traditionally bound to the product approach due to the exam-oriented system. Hence, these students are deprived the opportunity of experiencing the various stages of the process approach that entail elements of invention, drafting, feedback, and revision.

Many students struggle with writing, more so with continuous writing as it is more demanding in many ways compared to directed writing (Marimuthu & Goh 2005). The continuous writing section, like directed writing, in Paper One of the SPM English subject is also compulsory and carries 50 marks. Chinese EFL

students have problems in writing and this was revealed in a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education in their investigation among others which dealt with the SPM examination (Ministry of Education, 2008).

The English Language officer at the Penang Education Department had also pointed out that “the Chinese EFL students’ results for the SPM English subject was on the decline for the past three years and Paper 1, which is the writing component, seemed to be the factor”. He added that State Education Department recommended that EFL teachers have to alter their pedagogical approach in teaching writing to these Chinese students “as a measure to enhance their final writing products and furthermore, to improve their grades in the SPM examination”.

In this vein, the target sample of this study comprises of EFL Chinese students and this study adopts the LBDM and the Process Approach as the framework which underlies the MLITA and in this regard investigates the effects of MLITA whether it is able to address the challenges in a writing classroom by transforming conventional learning settings to more relevant learning environments that will be appropriate to the students’ real world context. It is hoped that this study which investigates the effects of the MLITA on continuous writing performance of Chinese EFL students, will enable the researcher to provide significant pedagogical implications and recommendations that will facilitate the improvement of the teaching and learning of writing in the EFL classroom.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the study**

The main aim of this study is to investigate the use of the MLITA in the teaching and learning of EFL writing. The purpose of this study is to investigate Chinese EFL students' performance of writing using the MLITA as a framework to transform conventional learning settings present in our communities to more relevant learning environments that will be appropriate to the real world context. Besides that, the MLITA to pedagogy is aimed to enhance students' writing performance which is in line with the Tenth Malaysia Plan's mission to revamp the education curriculum in order to align it to global standards. Specifically, the main objectives of this study are to:

- a. examine how the Multiliteracies Approach impacts on Chinese EFL students' continuous writing performance.
- b. evaluate EFL teachers' perceptions of teaching continuous writing using the Multiliteracies Approach.
- c. evaluate Chinese EFL students' perceptions of learning continuous writing using the Multiliteracies Approach.
- d. evaluate EFL teachers' perceptions of preparing writing lessons using the Learning Element.
- e. determine the factors that need to be taken into consideration when using the Multiliteracies Approach in the teaching of continuous writing.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

Proceeding from the foregoing purposes, the current study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the Multiliteracies Approach affect Chinese EFL students' continuous writing performance?
2. What are EFL teachers' perceptions of teaching continuous writing using the Multiliteracies Approach?
3. What are the Chinese EFL students' perceptions of learning continuous writing using the Multiliteracies Approach?
4. What are the EFL teachers' perceptions of teaching continuous writing using the Learning Element as a lesson plan?
5. What are the factors that need to be taken into consideration when using the Multiliteracies Approach in the teaching of continuous writing?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Firstly, this case study employs an action research that seeks to determine the recommendation of the MLITA which advocates the implementation of the LBDM, the LE as a lesson plan and the process approach as avenues to upgrade students' writing performance. The findings of this study can be used to contribute to the improvements of teaching EFL in the field of writing as the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011-2015) emphasizes a curriculum revamp which takes into account the strengths of this framework.

Currently, teachers are unable to translate the process or product approach into positive writing outcomes as students still lack the ability to produce compositions that adhere to rhetorical aspects of writing (Chan & Ain, 2004; Musa et al. 2003). Hence, the findings of this study will heighten awareness of teachers on the pressing issue of providing the relevant pedagogical approach and support for EFL students to master writing skills in a creative manner when the LBDM, LE and Process Approach are integrated through the implementation of the MLITA.

Secondly, this study can provide the Ministry of Education with useful insights based on the findings and implications of this study which would be beneficial for their future policy revisions, planning of educational programmes and relevant projects.

Thirdly, the Teacher Training Division can use the findings of this study to develop appropriate pre-service and in-service training programmes for secondary school teachers as they are relevant to the EFL teachers' pedagogical requirements when teaching writing in a second language. The LE adopted as a lesson plan in this study which promotes creative teaching and learning practices can be an alternative planning methodology to the current lesson plan and this can be seriously considered in the teacher training programme as the current lesson plan has been used for the past 50 years.

Furthermore, these findings can be utilised by EFL teachers to initiate self-reflection in their professional practices to address any inadequacies or shortcomings in their teaching and learning practices. These reflections on teaching practices and students' writing skills can be used as a point of reference for appropriate areas for action research at schools, districts and state levels.

As this study may be one of the first few which is based on using the LBDM, LE as a lesson plan and the process approach as a basis to plan creative writing lessons using the MLITA in teaching continuous writing, it is aimed at enhancing the teaching and learning of EFL and mastery of writing skills. Hence, it may well serve as a point of reference for future studies in this area.

### **1.7 Limitations of the Study**

There are several limitations that curtail the extent to which the findings of this study can be generalised. This study is based on only one Form Four EFL class of a Chinese school and limited to one action research teacher who conducted the writing lessons using the MLITA and three EFL teachers who observed the MLITA to writing lessons. Therefore, the relatively small sample size employed by this case study may not reflect the statistical support for any conclusive findings. This is especially in terms of directly generalising to all the EFL student population of schools in the country. However, the results obtained from the selected sample of this case study can provide useful insights on the effects of the MLITA on students' continuous writing performance, as there is hardly any research pertaining to this area in Malaysia.

EFL Chinese students' are confronted with various challenges when learning English as a foreign language and habitually tend to directly translate their ideas from Mandarin to English when they are speaking or writing. However, the objectives of this study did not take into account this aspect and hence, discourse analysis was not used as a basis to analyse the findings of this study.